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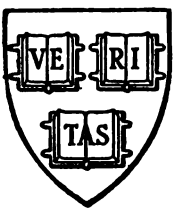

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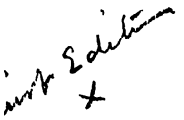

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AN IRISH GARLAND

AN IRISH GARLAND

BY

SARAH M. B. PIATT

AUTHOR OF 'A WOMAN'S POEMS,' ETC.

BOSTON
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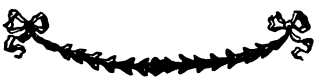


AN IRISH GARLAND

IN CLONMEL PARISH

CHURCHYARD

IN CLONMEL PARISH CHURCHYARD.

AT THE GRAVE OF CHARLES WOLFE.

WHERE the graves were many, we looked for one.
Oh, the Irish rose was red,
And the dark stones saddened the setting sun
With the names of the early dead.[1]
Then, a child who, somehow, had heard of him
In the land we love so well,
Kept lifting the grass till the dew was dim
In the churchyard of Clonmel.

But the sexton came. "Can you tell us where
Charles Wolfe is buried?" "I can.
—See, that is his grave in the corner there,
(Ay, he was a clever man,
If God had spared him!) It's many that come
To be asking for him," said he.
But the boy kept whispering, "Not a drum
Was heard,"—in the dusk to me.

(Then the grey man tore a vine from the wall
Of the roofless church where he lay,
And the leaves that the withering year let fall,
He swept, with the ivy, away;
And, as we read on the rock the words
That, writ in the moss, we found,
Right over his bosom a shower of birds
In music fell to the ground.)

. . . Young poet, I wonder did you care,
Did it move you in your rest
To hear that child in his golden hair,
From the mighty woods of the West,
Repeating your verse of his own sweet will,
To the sound of the twilight bell,
Years after your beating heart was still
In the churchyard of Clonmel?

AN ENCHANTED CASTLE

AN ENCHANTED CASTLE.

I.

I KNEW we were not quite awake
In this strange island, where no snake
Hides in the grass. (Take care! the grey,
Sad sea will wash it down, some day!)

Those daisies in the dew were such
As human hand might never touch;
That white moon, in the ferns and foam,
Was not the moon we loved at home.

The queer old man there in the grass,
Who did not beg, but let us pass,
Was not an Irish peasant—no.
(He *was*, three hundred years ago.)

And then the Castle, as it leant,
With many a weary battlement,
Against a cloud, could only be
Builded of cloud itself, you see.

II.

It was so still, so still within,
We almost heard the spider spin;
We almost heard the rust that eat
The bolts and bars about our feet.

We whispered, without words: "See that!"
As through the weed-wild court a cat
Glided, with steps that had no sound,
And faded through the dusk around.

There was a sudden laugh—a shout.
And lo! a gold head glimmered out
From a weird window grim with age.
(Was it my lady's pretty page?)

"Look! there goes Puss in Boots!" said he,
—"And *I'm* Boy Blue!" . . . Who doubts that we
Had lost the green world's utmost bound,
And strayed far into faëry ground?

A CALL ON SIR WALTER RALEIGH

A CALL ON SIR WALTER RALEIGH.

AT YOUGHAL, COUNTY CORK.

"Ay, not at home, then, didst thou say?
——And, prithee, hath he gone to court?"
"Nay; he hath sailed but yesterday,
With Edmund Spenser, from this port.

"This Spenser, folk do say, hath writ
Twelve cantos, called 'The Faërie Queene.'
To seek for one to publish it,
They go—on a long voyage, I ween."

Ah me! I came so far to see
This ruffed and pluméd cavalier,—
He whom romance and history,
Alike, to all the world make dear.

And I had some strange things to tell
Of our New World, where he hath been;
And now they say—I marked them well,—
They say the Master is not in!

The knaves speak not the truth; I see
Sir Walter at the window there.
—That is the hat, the sword, which he
In pictures hath been pleased to wear.

There hangs the very cloak whereon
Elizabeth set foot. (But oh,
Young diplomat, as things have gone,
Pity it is she soiled it so!)

And there—but look! he 's lost in smoke:
(That weirdly charmed Virginia weed!)
Make haste, bring anything; his cloak———
They save him with a shower, indeed!

. . . Ay, lost in smoke. I linger where
He walked his garden. Day is dim,
And death-sweet scents rise to the air
From flowers that gave their breath to him.

There, with its thousand years of tombs,[2]
The dark church glimmers where he prayed;
Here, with that high head shorn of plumes,
The tree he planted gave him shade.

That high head shorn of plumes? Even so
It stained the Tower, when grey with grief.
O tree he planted, as I go,
For him I tenderly take a leaf.

I have been dreaming here, they say,
Of one dead knight forgot at court.
——And yet he sailed but yesterday,
With Edmund Spenser, from this port.

TWO SABBATH PARTIES

TWO SABBATH PARTIES.

PICTURESQUE, comfortless, lonely and low,
In the greenest island of all the earth,
With room on the roof for the ferns to grow
In the blackened thatch, and room on the hearth
For hearts to beat, though the rain dropped through,
Was the cabin wherein they breathed, these two.

The one was a man, not young nor old,
Whose tall silk hat, toward the chapel's chime,
(Where few, you 'd say, were the sins he told,)
Had started gravely this many a time—
(A most ridiculous hat, and such
As the Irish peasant prizes much !)

And one was a child, with a sea-shell's blush
And a bare brown head, that was bright to see;
And I heard in the hedges an old-world thrush
(Or a robin, at home in an apple-tree !)
That broke one's heart with its song, while they
Walked, hand-in-hand, on their pleasant way.

Suddenly, out of his sacred grounds,
  Walled-in by ages, and shadow-dim,
A gentleman came, with his pet greyhounds,
  And his delicate children following him,
In violet velvet and long gold hair
Under drooping feathers, a pretty pair.

But the child from the cabin held her head
  As high as theirs, for she seemed to know
That *her* holiday-dress was a radiant red,
  And her Sabbath apron as clean as snow:
I could see no envy nor surprise,
At the little ladies, in her eyes.

She only said: "They are going to walk."
  "And sure they are. It's a lovely day.
Why shouldn't they go?" (I could hear their talk)—
  'If it pleases the gentleman. Any way,
He can afford it." "Do you wish that you
Could afford to be walking too?" "I do."

"But *you* can't afford to walk, do you know,
  On a lovely day?—and you can't, that's it.
For you have to work—and *he* hasn't, though!"
  She prattled as if she cared no whit,
While the face of the other grew sad and still,—
But he cheerily said: "If I must, I will."

A CHILD'S CRY

A CHILD'S CRY.

AT KILCOLMAN CASTLE, MARCH 1883.

I DO not meet him in his place
  (Nor miss him) I, who came to meet
At his own hearth, and face to face,
  A poet, world-beloved, whose feet
Here, walking toward Westminster's gloom,
Left daisies in their prints to bloom.

I do not miss him, though I look
  From windows where he watched, and try—
Ah me!—to think about his book.
  . . . There lie his hills, his streams, the high
Far singer, whose divine old song
Was—well, perhaps almost too long!

Hush! (Do I hear his grave sweet words
  To Walter Raleigh on the stair?)
—"You hear the little Irish birds;
  They 're singing all at once out there,"
The children said; "we made them fly
Out of the ivy." . . . No, not I.

It is———I tell you it might break
  One's heart to hear it! Listen. Oh,
It is a child's cry, scared awake
  By soldiers tramping to and fro:
The baby by its father's flight
Left—to the fire—at dead of night!

At dead of night it was. And still
  (Oh, burning cradle—foolish tears!)
At dead of night——but doubt who will,
  I hear it, through three hundred years.
And all the music Spenser writ
Is as a whisper now to it!

ON THE PIER AT QUEENSTOWN

ON THE PIER AT QUEENSTOWN.

So, there were they, all going home,
  In their long gloves and heavy rings,
Chattering of Paris, Venice, Rome,
  The Alps—and certain other things.
(O Land where they and I were born,
Somehow I loved them, half in scorn.)

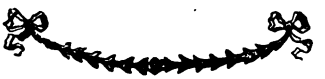
And there sat she—her cap of snow
  No whiter than her head, her face
(A gracious one, I thought) bent low
  In withering hands—there in her place,
While, careless of us all, she wailed
For one who—in the steerage—sailed.

And there, in that poor crowd, he sat:
  (The widow's only son was he?)
I knew him, for he wore his hat
  Low on his brow, that none might see,
Through the still sadness of his eyes,
His heart shake at his mother's cries.

A young man, tall, with dark, curled hair,
The rose of Ireland in his cheek,
And something stately in his air,
And Southern in his voice. To speak
The truth, he looked more proud than vain
Of blood the Armada brought from Spain.

Rough men with burdens passed her way,
With curse and jest. The ladies smiled
And stared. And still I heard her say,
Through many a sob, "My darling child!"
As from the Old World, fading through
The mist, he floated toward the New!

But when the boat had left the pier,
Where, with her head wrapped in her cloak,
She sat and moved not, I could hear
How, with his last long look, he broke
Into a farewell chant of pain
For this green isle of ruin and rain!



MISCELLANEOUS

THE LAST ANGEL

THE LAST ANGEL.

A STORY TOLD OF CORREGGIO.

THE monks had shut his picture in, and,—yearning
For one more last look, one, and yet one more,—
Heavily laden, with the hollows burning
In his dusk cheek, he left the convent door.

Through the South sun he wandered homeward, moaning:
"His Christ for silver gave the Jew of old;
Have I not sinned like him beyond atoning?
My Christ for copper I to-day have sold."

Alone he walked, afraid to meet the faces
He loved the most on earth—Ah, bitter fate!
His beautiful starving children, with hot traces
Of tears on cheeks, were crowded at the gate.

But one, the youngest, spent with innocent weeping,
  Touched by the weird moon with a tender beam,
Among the shadows in the straw lay sleeping,
  Forgetting all, and laughing at her dream.

Her father looked at her, and lifted slowly
  His dying hand: —"Give me my brush," he said.
When his Last Angel, radiant and holy,
  Looked at him with his child's eyes, he was dead.

THE CONFESSION OF MY NEIGHBOUR

THE CONFESSION OF MY NEIGHBOUR,

AFTER SHE HAD BEEN FORTUNATE.

YES, this is what my neighbour said that night,
In the still shadow of her stately house,
(Fortune came to her when her head was white,)
What time dark leaves were weird in withering boughs,
And each late rose sighed with its latest breath,
"This sweet world is too sweet to end in death."

But this is what my neighbour said to me:
"I grieved my youth away for that or this.
I had upon my hand the ring you see,
With pretty babies in my arms to kiss,
And one man said I had the sweetest eyes,
He was quite sure, this side of Paradise.

"But then our crowded cottage was so small,
And spacious grounds would blossom full in sight;
Then one would fret me with an India shawl,
And one flash by me in a diamond's light;
And one would show me wealth of precious lace,
And one look coldly from her painted face.

"I did not know that I had everything,
Till—I remembered it. Ah me! ah me!
I who had ears to hear the wild-bird sing,
And eyes to see the violets. . . . It must be
A bitter fate that jewels the grey hair,
Which once was golden and had flowers to wear.

"In the old house, in my old room, for years,
The haunted cradle of my little ones gone
Would hardly let me look at it for tears.
. . . O my lost nurslings! I stay on and on,
Only to miss you from the empty light
Of my low fire—with my own grave in sight.

"In the old house, too, in its own old place,
Handsome and young, and looking towards the gate
Through which it flushed to meet me, is a face
For which, ah me! I never more shall wait—
For which, ah me! I wait for ever, I
Who for the hope of it, can surely die.

"Young men write gracious letters here to me,
That ought to fill this mother-heart of mine.

The youth in this one crowds all Italy!
This glimmers with the far Pacific's shine.
The first poor little hand that warmed my breast
Wrote this—the date is old: you know the rest.

"Oh, if I only could have back my boys,
With their lost gloves and books for me to find,
Their scattered playthings and their pleasant noise!
. . . I sit here in the splendour growing blind,
With hollow hands that backward reach, and ache
For the sweet trouble which the children make."

A STRANGE COUNTRY

A STRANGE COUNTRY.

It 's a strange story I must tell
Of a strange country, Louis? Well,
The strangest country that I know
Is one where palm-trees do not grow;
It lies within the very reach
  Of your two hands, and blue-birds flit
Among the flowers of pear and peach,
  In pleasant dews, all over it.

In this strange country, then, last night,
A lady in the gracious light
Of garden-lamps and rising moon
(Hush! you may do your guessing soon),
With bits of stone she chose to wear,
  That elfin queens, perhaps, had lost,
Outflashed the fire-flies in the air,—
  And what a sum her party cost!

This morning, with a beard as white
As his own shroud should be, in sight
Of her high windows' precious lace,
A man—with, oh! so sad a face
One scarce could look at it for tears—
  Stood with a staff, and slowly said:
"It 's the first time in all these years;
  But, Madam, I must ask for bread."

The lady, lily-like, within
Her hands, that did not toil nor spin,
Held all sweet things this world can give;
The man, for just the breath to live,
Early and late, in sun and snow,
  Had done his best. —I thought you knew!
. . . It must be a strange country, though,
  Where such strange stories can be true.

THE GIFT OF TEARS

THE GIFT OF TEARS.

THE legend says: In Paradise
God gave the world to man. Ah me!
The woman lifted up her eyes:
"Woman, I have but tears for thee."
But tears? And she began to shed,
Thereat, the tears that comforted.

(No other beautiful woman breathed,
No rival among men had he.
The seraph's sword of fire was sheathed,
The golden fruit hung on the tree.
Her lord was lord of all the earth,
Wherein no child had wailed its birth.)

"Tears to a bride?" "Yea, therefore tears."
"In Eden?" "Yea, and tears therefore."
Ah, bride in Eden, there were fears
In the first blush your young cheek wore,
Lest that first kiss had been too sweet,
Lest Eden withered from your feet.

Mother of women! Did you see
How brief your beauty, and how brief,
Therefore, the love of it must be,
In that first garden, that first grief?
Did those first drops of sorrow fall
To move God's pity for us all?

Oh, sobbing mourner by the dead—
One watcher at the grave grass-grown!
Oh, sleepless for some darling head
Cold-pillowed on the prison-stone,
Or wet with drowning seas! He knew
Who gave the gift of tears to you!

COMFORT THROUGH A WINDOW

COMFORT THROUGH A WINDOW.

(CHILD WITHIN TO TRAMP WITHOUT.)

It 's not so nice here as it looks,
With china that keeps breaking so,
And five of Mr. Tennyson's books
Too fine to look in—is it, though?

If you just had to sit here (Well!)
In satin chairs too blue to touch,
And look at flowers too sweet to smell,
In vases—would you like it much?

If you see any flowers, they grow,
And you can find them in the sun.
These are the ones we buy, you know,
In winter-time—when there are none!

Then you can sit on rocks, you see,
And walk about in water, too—
Because you have no shoes! Dear me!
How many things they let you do!

Then you can sleep out in the shade
All day, I guess, and all night too,
Because—you know, you 're not afraid
Of other fellows just like you!

You have no house like this, you know,
(Where mamma 's cross, and ladies call)—
You have the world to live in, though,
And that 's the prettiest place of all!

MY NEIGHBOUR'S RING

MY NEIGHBOUR'S RING.

I NEVER envied his fair, fruitful lands,
His stately house, his slaves, nor anything,
In the old days, for on his too-white hands
I saw and knew the ring.

To-night there is strange news abroad, I 'm told.
—The ring, the ring! It is the same, ah me!
That to their Lord the fishermen of old
Brought back from the deep sea!

NOTES.

(1) Page 11—Queenstown, Ireland, formerly called the Cove of Cork, of which Clonmel Parish Churchyard is the cemetery, was early a place of resort for consumptives.

(2) Page 20—St. Mary's Church, one of the most ancient and interesting, from an historical point of view, among old Irish churches, almost adjoins the house known as Sir Walter Raleigh's at Youghal, County Cork, Ireland.

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